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THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 1909.

THE ASSESSMENT OF TAXES: A RECENT INSTANCE.

The vast difference in the assessment of taxes between various counties of the State, to which we referred some days ago, is not the only injustice of the present system of assessment. Not only do counties in different sections of the State, or even adjoining counties, contribute in a most disproportionate degree to the support of the State, but often, within the same county, taxes are levied in a manner which accomplishes every other end than that of justice and equity.

This fact, which has been observed by all who have examined taxation in counties where the work is done by different assessors, has been strikingly demonstrated recently in a county not far from this city. For some reason the assessor of one district in the county was removed, and, in his place, another man was appointed to assess the district. This newcomer had learned of the duties of his office, not from his friends and neighbors, but from the statutes. We found that the law and his oath required that he list property at its full market value, and not at a traditional or arbitrary figure. Proceeding on this basis, he was amazed at his discoveries: lands were assessed at about half of what they would bring under the hammer; perhaps a third of the personal property within the district was valued at about 50 cents on the dollar; the rest was omitted altogether.

The law left no room for compromise, and compelled the assessor to make his returns at full value. The tax-payers had to settle with the treasurer accordingly. The result of this simple regard for the law—a regard owed by every officer—was to work great injustice on the honest men of the district in question. In other districts of the county the old valuation was continued and assessments remained unchanged. Hence it followed that on one side of the road a farmer was paying about twice the taxes as his neighbor was paying on the same property. The assessor has either to win for himself the title of a hard and unjust man, or else violate his oath. If he does his duty, he has no assurance that the other assessors will do theirs.

Is this just to the honest man, and is it fair to the debt-ridden State? Are tax-payers who make out their returns under the eye of a just assessor to pay full value on their property, while their neighbors, protected by a friendly assessor, are paying on only 50 per cent. of what they own? There can be no equivocation in answering this question. Common justice, common sense and common decency demand the reform of the present method of assessing taxes as the first step in a modern and just system of State taxation.

POLL-TAXES PAID BY MAIL.

The decision in the Ward law case was in the interest of greater freedom in regard to special elections. The decision in the poll-tax cases is in the interest of greater freedom in regard to all elections. By ruling that "personal" payment of the capitation tax does not mean payment in bodily presence, the Supreme Court has declined to throw a new and annoying restriction upon the qualification of a suffrage. The arguments here are perfectly familiar. No good reason appears why the Constitution should have required the physical presence of the voter, while there is every reason why he should be paid that his voting tax be paid from his own estate. No doubt the two meanings are mutually exclusive; if the Constitution meant one thing it did not mean the other; and it is plain enough that the source of the money paid is of much more importance in maintaining a pure electorate than is the manner or form in which the money is paid.

This view, amply supported as it was by established uses of the word "personal," in the statutes and but of them, was evidently decisive in the minds of the court. To determine the real intent of the restriction, "we should look to the evil which the framers of the Constitution had in view," the court says; and later it cites a Florida decision which lays down the general principle that "a liberal construction should obtain in favor of the voter's right to make the payment through another, and the act does not in terms deny such right." No specially liberal construction was necessary in this Virginia case, but the court was no doubt quite prepared, if necessary, to go beyond half-splitting and trivial technicalities in the interest of common sense. To require that voters must appear at the treasurer's window and hand over tax payments with their own hands would disfranchise the sick and the absent, and would be very inconvenient to many others. Many thousands of

voters who had supposed themselves properly qualified would have been barred at one stroke from partaking in the election for Governor. For hardships of this sort, certain to arise, there could be no compensating advantages, and it is fair to assume that the framers of the Constitution so understood.

THE BURDEN OF MILITARISM.

Of all extravagances for which civilized nations suffer none are so unlimited or ineluctable as naval and military appropriations. For twenty years a large portion of the press of this country has warned and pleaded and adjured without being able to stay the hand or lessen the appropriations of Congress for greater armies and greater navies. In 1896 "The Times" called attention to the fact that within three years the expenditure for navy maintenance in the United States would reach the sum of \$250,000,000, and added: "The navy in its present state of development has fixed a grievous and permanent burden upon us. Let us stop where we are before we convert the navy into a side pocket that absorbs a great part of our taxation while it is threatening us with continued and disastrous foreign wars."

To-day the feared expenditure of \$300,000,000 has grown to \$350,000,000 without in any way satisfying the clamorous demands of the Jingo for more money. Between them, the army and the navy cost nearly \$250,000,000 per year, which lays a burden of over \$15 on every family of five.

Because this country is rich; because we have so far escaped alike the suffering and destruction of a long and disastrous war, we need not feel that even the United States can forever endure the growing drain of military appropriations. There are about 12,000,000 people in the United Kingdom, and on this population already rests a burden of \$155,000,000 per annum for navy estimates, a weight that is crushing the life out of that once prosperous country. Though we have doubled the population we have very nearly reached the same expenditure, and sooner or later unless this extravagance is stopped the United States also will find itself enmeshed, hampered and crushed by the sums it is spending to prepare for wars that no one expects and against foes that no one can name.

DISCUSSING MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT.

Councilman Davis offers the suggestion that calling a man a commissioner, instead of calling him a councilman, does not make him any more able, or honest or intelligent or competent. This is certainly true. But he overlooks the fact that a good deal more is involved in a change to the commissioner plan than a mere shifting of names. For one thing there is the great reduction in numbers and consequent increase of authority, making it considerably more of a distinction to be one of the city's administrators. For another there is the compensation. By offering salaries commensurate with the importance and responsibilities of the duties to be done, which would be the surest and soundest economy in the end, Richmond could secure the services of some of her ablest citizens, who might well be attracted to the absorbing work of managing a large municipality. The commission plan rests upon the theory, not simply of applying a new title to the old Council, but of calling into service a type of man who can rarely be induced to serve upon the Council.

The hearing before the special investigative committee on Tuesday night was valuable in opening the subject of municipal government to public discussion. The more of these hearings there are, and the more the attention of citizens can be directed toward them, the better. All the speakers at this first meeting seemed to agree that our present system is outworn, unsatisfactory and inefficient. There was some doubt to what the new system should be like, and one or two speakers specifically opposed the commission plan. A former Councilman argued that it was "dangerous," as commissioners could so manipulate matters as virtually to own the city and pass it on to their heirs. Just how they could do this with a provision for the "recall" in the charter is not easy to see. Most commission-governed cities have this provision, which enables them to renege an officer at pleasure upon petition for an election signed by some 25 per cent. of the voters. Los Angeles is "recalling" a Mayor this month.

If concentration of authority is necessarily "dangerous," then the commission system is dangerous, for that is precisely what it is designed to do. However, gigantic businesses are conducted by this same concentration of authority, and many of them are organizations of marvelous efficiency. On the other hand, diffusion of authority, as every Council-managed large city has seen it, inevitably produces dilatoriness and inefficiency, and these things, we take it, may be decidedly dangerous in their way. The straight commission may not be the best plan devisable for Richmond, though probably it is. It can be modified in various ways, even down to retaining two bodies for legislative and executive purposes, as John B. Minor suggests. The main consideration is that we should have a small group of able and well-paid men, who should give their whole time to administering the city's affairs, and whose great power should be balanced by a sure and direct responsibility for all their acts.

Mr. Roosevelt's wireless farewell to Mr. Taft read, "Parting takes, love and sincerity." It's awfully pretty, but what does it mean?

from his job than to draw one Ohio Congressman off the scent of the pie trail.

Africa doesn't know it, but there are going to be some new Ananiases out there before long.

The man who drops three lumps into a cup of taxed tea will everywhere be recognized as a spender from the heart.

Our firm and settled opinion is that no known kidnapper could ever win the graphophone in a popularity voting contest.

The Democratic view of the tariff, as reflected in the House, may best be expressed by the coefficient 184.

Considering the number of little jokers in it, it is not the Payne tariff bill a whole Paragraphers' Union in itself?

The Topika capital's idea of a useful life is to have so little to do that you can take your lunch to a murder trial and stay all day. Can you beat it?

We have noticed about these tariff duties that when the time for final duties is over, it is invariably Richard Roe, the guileless consumer, who finds the freight bills on his breakfast plate.

"The boat that undertakes to carry Roosevelt to Africa," says the Milltown Banner, "will have good deal at stake." Sure, Hamburg stake.

Somebody has almost discovered the South Pole, but Walter Wellman's alibi is absolutely unimpeachable.

Mr. Hall Caine says he no longer feels any bitterness toward the publisher who once rejected him, as though that were anything. If every author endeavored to keep on selling his wares, and every publisher who turned him down, the world's supply of bitterness would be exhausted by day after to-morrow.

Our private research workers report that many of those who were cheered as the Hamlets went down the bay were leading Wall Street men.

STATE PRESS.

Death to Kidnappers.

If there is one crime that surely merits the extreme penalty of the law, it is that of stealing a little child from its parents and holding it for ransom. For this crime, and for no other, the penalty of death is to be hoped other States will follow her example until this crime against the innocent is wiped out.

The crime itself is almost unknown in Virginia, but a conviction would lead the perpetrator in this Commonwealth to the gallows. One of those who still retains capital punishment as its penalty, or an imprisonment in the penitentiary, at the option of the jury, is Portsmouth Star.

Other Queries Will Come.

In this writing we are not concerned with the existing and prospective differences of opinion between the two contestants for the gubernatorial nomination. The question is enough to divide the respective pronouncements and commitments and to examine their comparative consistency with Democratic principles. For the purpose of this article it suffices that this paper has measurably contributed to explosion of the baseless and pernicious notion that the full franchise of the State should be given to the people who suffrages they are asking. It belongs to and behooves the people to know the facts in all probable contingencies, and the power will be directed which it is theirs to bestow. He who is the applicant for a situation must have no reserve of opinion.

Are the pending canvasses shall have closed there will be other queries, pithy and pertinent, that will be asked of the candidates and of the various nominations in the gift of the Democratic voters, and these not only should be met but must and will be answered—Norfolk Virginian-Pilot.

Norfolk County Roads.

Norfolk county, one of the richest in the State, is seriously troubled with the matter of building good roads, and the time will come when the wisdom and profit of this work will be even more fully recognized than at present.

Yesterday the permanent road commission of the county decided to build a macadam road from Portsmouth to the hamlet of Point at a cost of \$25,000, and another, with concrete bridges, from Berkeley to Great Bridge, at a cost of \$50,000. In addition the board will be asked for the completion of the Jamestown boulevard, and for a macadam road from Portsmouth to Deep Creek.—Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch.

Prohibition Will Not Down.

Senator Mann is rejoicing too soon if he thinks that the prohibition amendment will not be an issue in the next campaign. The question will enter in one form or other in the fight in every legislative district in the State. The amendment may not want to enter into the campaign, but they can't help themselves. The "dry" people throughout the State will be ready to fight, and the legislature shall be composed of men of known sympathy with their cause and who will take no step backward in the war on the saloon.—Fredericksburg Evening Journal.

Good Hunting and a Safe Return.

Enough to know that the ex-President has just embarked upon what is likely to prove a highly interesting experience, and one that is likely to be a profitable one. It is from this standpoint that the public is now regarding the distinguished traveler. It wishes him all manner of good luck, and hopes that he will return in health and safe in limb as when he left, and renders assurance that it will be ready to greet him with the warmest of welcomes and congratulations the moment he sets foot on American shores again.—Lynchburg News.

The Courts of Europe

By La Marquise de Fontenay.

Crime in Russia.

EVERY now and again the world is informed of the number of people who have been executed in Russia, mostly by hanging, the figures averaging a little over 2,000 for twelve months during the last two years. The number is a terrible record. But in order to place it in its proper light, the opposite side of the ledger should be given. Official returns show that during the space of two years 19,144 specific cases of murders by Anarchists and Terrorists took place in Russia, and that, in addition, 20,794 persons were more or less severely maimed. That is to say, the daily recorded instances of persons having been killed or injured by the revolutionists in the space of twenty-four months numbered about 10,000.

Even these figures, appalling as they are, do not tell of the hundreds of thousands of people who have been executed in Russia, and to pile up a record of over 20,000 actual murders, and as many more maimings, during the space of two years, there would be a still larger number of hangings than those with which the Russian authorities are credited; and if the various State governments did not do their duty in the execution of the law, the number of hangings would be still larger.

Since the death of the Duke of Braganza, the Duke of Oporto, only brother of the murdered King Carlos, and a confirmed bachelor, has just been named as the next heir to the throne of Portugal.

It is this that has been largely responsible for the reconciliation which has just taken place between the Duke of Braganza and the Duke of Oporto. The Duke of Braganza, until now an exile, is the only son of the late King Miguel of Portugal, who after having wasted the throne on his niece, Queen Maria Della Gloria, to whom he stood in the relation of guardian and agent, was himself at the age of six years of age, and was deposed and driven into exile.

Since his death the Duke of Braganza has been regarded as the legitimate pretender to the throne of Portugal, and as such has commanded the sympathies not only of the church and of the nobility, but of the people. He is a man of noble birth and of noble character, and is a man of noble character.

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